

Recognizing Complex Instruction in the Classroom

When observing classrooms engaged in effective groupwork using Complex Instruction strategies, a visitor should see and hear the following:

- **Student-to-student talk that is student-initiated and on-task**

Students ask questions and listen to responses. Students press each other to explain their thinking, justifying by telling “why” as well as “how.”

- **Student talk that is inclusive**

Each student is heard. Students perhaps known to be low-status in other academic settings have a voice in content-related and group process-related discourse. Students are taking responsibility for their own learning and the learning of their groupmates.

- **An emerging multiple-abilities focus**

Teachers begin to address issues of status by helping students perceive themselves and their peers as resources for learning, each capable within a broader range of intellectual competence of the specific discipline.

- **A shared commitment to groupwork skills**

Though most of their talk is about content, students use skills they have learned to support quality group interaction. Students and their teacher spend sufficient time developing, sustaining, and improving appropriate groupwork norms and roles. Students reflect on their interaction and give respectful feedback to their groupmates. Teachers provide regular feedback to students on their interaction and intervene in support of group autonomy and interdependence.

- **Teacher interventions and student assessment that attend to both individual and group accountability**

When students are working in groups, the teacher intervenes in ways that promote individual responsibility, group autonomy and interdependence, and an inclusive process. Similarly, teachers assess their students in ways that communicate and evaluate the importance of both individual and group accomplishment.